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The Presidency—IV

A Study of Eisenhower's Attempt to Make Unity a Guiding Principle of Government

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WASHINGTON, June 20—President Eisenhower came into American political life in a convulsive era as a symbol of unity. Fortunately he has tried to extend the principle of unity into the machinery of the Presidency.

The essence of his personal power is that nobody is mad at him. Men may differ with him, or feel sorry for him, or ridicule his ingenuous copy-book-maxim approach to life and government, but even then they seldom regard him with personal hostility.

This is a powerful factor that has contributed to his record as chief executive, legislative leader, mentor to a divided party, head of a mighty coalition and even as negotiator with the Russians.

But what happens when he is stricken twice within nine months and cannot use all his personal powers of persuasion?

The answer to this is that his leadership is seriously weakened by absence and doubts about the future. But while the President is temporarily on the sidelines, the Presidency as an institution has not been uninfluenced by his passionate interest in unity and teamwork.

For example, promptly at 12:30 this afternoon, eight men walked into the Secretary of State's dining room on the fifth floor of the New State Department Building on Virginia Avenue.

The host at luncheon was the Under Secretary of State, Herbert Hoover Jr. The others were William H. Jackson, the special assistant to the President for Foreign Affairs; Reuben B. Robertson Jr., Under Secretary of Defense; Harold E. Stassen, the President's special assistant for disarmament; Lieut. Gen. C. P. Cabell, director of the Central Intelligence Agency; John B. Hollister, director of the International Cooperation Administration; Theodore C. Streibert, director of the United States Information Agency, and one of their aides, Elmer B. Staats.

Operations Board Meeting

This was the weekly Wednesday meeting of the Operations Coordinating Board, the least-known but probably the most important Eisenhower contribution to the machinery of the Presidency.

The O. C. B. is not a policy-making committee. It has nothing to do with the operations of the Government within the United States. Its sole function is to see that the overseas operations of the Government are being carried out by all departments and agencies in accordance with the policies recommended by the National Security Council and approved by the President.

In short, it is an anti-confusion device. It was grafted on to the Presidency to see that a big government that is getting bigger does not have one department carrying out overseas policy one way and several other departments carrying it out some other way.

There are no so many officials from so many departments operating overseas—on information, agriculture, atomic energy, commerce, labor, immigration, intelligence and defense—that harassed United States Ambassadors have trouble recognizing them all, let alone keeping tabs on what they are all doing.

Consequently, the O. C. B. was created under the President and the security council to coordinate and follow their overseas operations and see that they stayed coordinated.

This is a big job, roughly equivalent to seeing that all mortals operate in accordance with the Ten Commandments. But the idea is clear it is to carry out Eisenhower's passion for teamwork.

It would be wrong to suggest that this was a wholly original idea. In September of 1939, a week after Germany invaded Poland, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Executive Office of the President.

This was Mr. Roosevelt's realization, after almost seven years in power, that the President, without an elaboration of Presidential staff services, could not possibly supervise and unify both executive policy formulation and execution.

Truman Set Up N. S. C.

This was greatly improved under President Truman with the creation of the National Security Council, a committee of the Cabinet, ably staffed and charged with coordinating security policy.

Since then, however, it has become increasingly (and sometimes painfully) evident that coordinating policy was not enough. Carrying out of that policy had also to be coordinated if United States officials, who have a weakness for thinking in narrow departmental terms, were not to interpret the coordinated policies in a dozen different uncoordinated ways.

The O. C. B.'s headquarters are at Jackson Place and Pennsylvania Avenue in an old house once owned by Gen. William T. (If nominated I will not accept, if elected I will not serve) Sherman. It has subcommittees working all over this town.

There are, in fact, more than forty of them, some watch-dogging information operations overseas, some studying certain countries, others following whole regions, some checking on atomic energy operations.

At least once every six months, each of these committees produces a "progress report" which goes to the National Security Council and the White House.

Whenever they find that a policy is so obscure that it defies coordinated execution, they yell to the security council for a better one. When they find some eager beaver overseas conducting his own private foreign policy, they blow the whistle on him.

Has Its Detractors

That, at least, is the theory. The O. C. B., of course, has its critics. There are some officials here who think it is the greatest time-killer since the invention of golf. Others blanch at the thought of all those committee meetings, all those bootless, vainglorious speeches, and all those "progress reports," which, they charge, are never read by the President.

Nevertheless, the O. C. B. is by general consent a useful new device of the Presidency that is developing authority and coming out of its early development stage.

It has not managed to keep the officials it is intended to serve from making countless contradictory statements. And since its members have vastly different ideas about many operations, the old question arises: "Who will coordinate the coordinators?"

Just the same, in any study of the President and the Presidency, the Operations Coordinating Board is bound to interest the historians. It cannot make up for the absences of the President. It cannot persuade the Congress to vote the President's foreign aid funds; it cannot coordinate policy (that is the function of the N. S. C.); it cannot provide the leadership necessary to get the United States into an effective international trade organization. But it can help produce some unity in the operations of policies that are already on the books.

Thus, it draws attention to a fact that is seldom noticed, namely that the President has tried to institutionalize his concept of teamwork. And institutions such as the O. C. B., while far from perfect, are helping carry on as best they can while the President is away from the White House.